

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2020  
Budget



(formerly USC Canada)

**Recommendation #1:**

**That the Government provide funding in the amount of \$30 million to SeedChange to continue our research, training, and funding programs to build climate resilience and provide economic opportunities through agriculture in Canada and around the world.**



## WHO WE ARE

### A Canadian Success Story Since 1945

SeedChange was founded as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada by Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, a Czech refugee, in 1945. Dr. Lotta founded USC Canada based on principles of human dignity and equality, with a vision to build a 'better, kinder world for all'. She inspired generations of Canadians to donate their time and resources to help people help themselves. What began as a project to support the children of post-war Europe grew to one of Canada's best-known international development organizations, delivering life-saving programming across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.



"I first met Lotta Hitschmanova [when] she came to my classroom... she radiated love and concern. When I was 25, I received...royalties from radio play of my first album. It felt like such a godsend that it seemed appropriate to share it with those less lucky...and so I became a donor."

- Bruce Cockburn, Singer-Songwriter and USC Canada spokesperson

"I can remember her voice so distinctly on the CBC radio noon program that my parents listened to in very rural Saskatchewan where I grew up. As a small child I conjured up my own images of her work and was amazed how her work continued to influence me in the years that my husband and I lived and worked in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Pakistan."

- H.W., USC Canada donor

Through the Sustainable Development Goals, we understand that the challenges farmers, the populations they feed, and the agricultural ecosystems on which we all depend, are global in nature. In 2011, USC Canada launched a Canadian program, working hand in hand with farmers across the country to build climate resilience through funding, research, and training programs that enhance on-farm biodiversity and promote sustainable farming.

We are approaching a significant milestone in 2020 - our 75th anniversary. The world is changing, and to deliver impact for the next 75 years, we must adapt. In September 2019, USC Canada will announce a transition to a new name: **SeedChange** (Sème l'avenir in French). This new name was registered with Corporations Canada in January 2019. Under this banner we will inspire a new generation of Canadians as Dr. Lotta inspired generations before, now through a global mission to empower rural communities and build climate resilience through agriculture. For the remainder of this submission we refer to our organization with its new name.



## WHAT WE DO

Our Mission: To build food sovereignty by working with partners to enhance biodiversity, promote ecological agriculture, and counter inequity.

SeedChange currently supports 40,000 farmers and 162,000 of their family members in 690 communities in 11 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In Canada, we are a trailblazer in research, training, and funding for climate resilience in agriculture. Much of this impact has been delivered in partnership with the Government of Canada, from whom we have received continuous support for decades.

All of our programs are delivered collaboratively with local agencies in international contexts and food and farming organizations in Canada, as well as research institutions, and other civil society partners.

Together, we conserve and enhance on-farm agricultural biodiversity to provide food security, climate resilience and economic opportunities for farmers. We link farmers and researchers through innovative partnerships to develop varieties of plants that are locally adapted and grown agroecologically. We ask for policies that will improve ecological farmers' and seed producers' ability to register and certify their seeds, and to develop markets for their businesses.

SeedChange currently receives support from Global Affairs Canada and the Ministère de l'agriculture, des pêcheries et de l'alimentation, and provides matching funds for programs supported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Western Economic Diversification Canada, and the Provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

SeedChange also receives donations from generous Canadians across the country, many of whom have been contributing to our work for decades. We are supported by many private philanthropic foundations across the country, and leverage that support to increase the impact of Government of Canada contributions.

Canadian farmers are among the most trusted voices in the country, are on the frontlines of climate change, and should be leaders in any climate strategy. As stewards of ecosystems and keepers of biodiversity, they are in the strongest position to find solutions, based on their knowledge and needs. Recent polling showed 92% of respondents believe Canada should have a strong and sustainable food industry. Canadians care about these issues, and they want to see farmers leading the way.



## HOW WE DO IT

SeedChange's programs demonstrate the effectiveness of agroecology as a climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation strategy that can be scaled out for wider impact. Agricultural biodiversity is the cornerstone of SeedChange's work in agriculture. Biodiversity is our best insurance against climate change, because diversity in species and varieties gives us more options when it comes to dealing with climate shocks.

### **PRESERVING SEED DIVERSITY**

The Svalbard 'Doomsday Vault' is an important initiative to preserve diverse collections of seeds. It currently holds 968,000 seed varieties originating from almost every country in the world. Similar national seed collections exist in many countries. However, these *ex-situ* seed banks are not sufficient as strategies for conserving genetic diversity and keeping it alive. SeedChange helps farmers conserve and grow biodiversity by establishing on-farm (*in-situ*) seed collections, community seed and gene banks, and networks of farmers who exchange and spread seeds. In-situ conservation is the most effective way of keeping seed diversity alive in farmers' fields, giving seeds the chance to adapt to changing conditions year after year through replanting. .

### **MITIGATING RISK THROUGH FARMER-LED RESEARCH**

Participatory plant breeding, where farmers take a central role in developing new plant varieties of their choice, is widely supported by the SeedChange network. Using their knowledge of how different varieties perform under different conditions, farmers are able to breed and select plant varieties to enhance performance and yields under variable conditions, as well as specific traits related to taste, colour, nutrition, cooking, and storability. Farmer breeders working with SeedChange don't see a trade-off between increasing yields and all the other benefits of agriculture. Many are achieving both.

### **PROMOTING AGROECOLOGY TO A NEW GENERATION**

Family farming is endangered by ageing demographics. Agroecology is an attractive option to young farmers, and represents a win-win strategy to stem the demographic decline in farming while boosting livelihoods and sustaining family farming. Young women are critical to support in agriculture globally, and represent a growing demographic of farmers in Canada. Through agroecology, the women leaders involved in Seed Change programs are strengthening their positions in their communities, increasing their access and control over land and productive resources, and enhancing community food security and resilience to climate change. We advocate for policies and incentives that support new farmers, women farmers, and the next generation of farmers, to access land, help cover startup costs, and assist with business risk management programs tailored to small and ecological production models.



## LOCAL ACTION FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

Investing in on-farm research, training and funding programs that benefit smallholder farmers, women, youth and Indigenous Peoples advances the Government of Canada's commitments to:

- **The International Plant Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.** The Treaty recognizes the enormous contributions of farmers in conserving and developing crop genetic resources. Articles 6.1 and 5.2 call for member countries to avoid genetic erosion and support sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and Article 9 calls for member countries to recognize and protect farmers' traditional knowledge, rights and participation in decision-making regarding the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- **The UN Convention on Biological Diversity.** The Convention is the primary international instrument to govern biological diversity, establish and monitor targets, regulate access and benefits from biodiversity, and assess new and emerging issues affecting biodiversity. The Convention's three pillars: the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use, and equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of biodiversity and genetic resources.
- **The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing.** The Nagoya Protocol of the CBD establishes a legal framework for the utilization of genetic resources covered under the Biodiversity Convention, and creates incentives to conserve and sustainably use genetic resources, enhancing the contribution of biodiversity for development and human well being.
- **The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants.** Adopted in December 2018, the Declaration aims to improve the rights and lives of people living and working in rural areas, including smallholder farmers, women, Indigenous Peoples and others.
- **Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy:** Agriculture is the main source of livelihoods for 79% of women in the global South. Women's empowerment is advanced by strengthening women farmers' organizations, ensuring women's access and control over productive assets and resources (land, seeds, finance), valuing women's knowledge, and their equal participation in decision-making within households, communities, and institutions.

**Canada is in a unique position to be a global leader demonstrating how agriculture can be a driver in the transition to a low carbon economy.**



## **INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE TO DRIVE CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

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Through our decades of work in communities around the world we have observed a common pattern: positive change in the food system will affect change across broader society. To alleviate poverty, empower women, youth and Indigenous Peoples, and to achieve climate resilience, all roads lead to farmers and farming.

We cannot fix climate without agriculture. Globally, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development estimate agriculture is responsible for 10-12% of greenhouse gas emissions, with an additional 9-11% from land use changes due to agriculture. Statistics Canada assigns 10% of Canada's total emissions, 30% of national methane emissions, and 77% of national nitrous oxide emissions to agriculture. This does not include transportation of agricultural products across a large land mass, or emissions related to the manufacturing and distribution of agricultural inputs. Credible sources estimate agriculture, forestry and land use account for a quarter of global anthropogenic emissions.

Compounding these issues is a biodiversity crisis in farming worldwide. The FAO estimates that 75% of crop diversity has been lost in the last century; 6,000 plant species are cultivated for food around the world, but less than 200 contribute substantially to global food output; 9 crops alone account for 66% of total production; and, we derive most of our nourishment from 12 plant and 5 animal species. When we lose biodiversity in farming, we become more vulnerable to weather shocks, pests and diseases. Biodiversity loss compounds climate risks, and raises questions about food security and the viability of farm livelihoods worldwide.

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainability recently released a report indicating that feeding the world sustainably is within our reach. SeedChange is seeking support to strengthen programs in Canada and globally to conserve and enhance on-farm agricultural biodiversity, pursue research to develop crop varieties that are locally adapted and grown agroecologically, and develop markets for local, ecological businesses. There is huge potential to build climate resilience through agriculture, but this potential cannot be realized without funding to local agencies driving innovations on the ground. It is with this in mind that we ask for your continued support.